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**FOUR PERSONS INDICTED IN CONSPIRACY TO OBTAIN IMMIGRATION
BENEFITS THROUGH FRAUDULENT MARRIAGES**

FRESNO – United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that HARBANS KAUR HOTH, 52; PARAMJIT SINGH TAGGAR, 44; GURDEEP SINGH ATWAL, 43, all from Fresno; and PRITAM KAUR, 35, from San Jose, California, have been charged in an indictment with one count of conspiracy and multiple counts of making false statements about marriages that were entered into for the purpose of obtaining immigration benefits. All four defendants are charged in the conspiracy count. The indictment also alleges that sophisticated means were used to carry out the conspiracy. In addition, defendant HOTH faces two counts of making false statements; defendant TAGGAR faces three counts of making false statements; defendant ATWAL faces four counts of making false statements; and defendant KAUR faces five counts of making false statements. A federal grand jury in Fresno returned the indictment earlier this month, and it was unsealed in U.S. District Court today.

This case is the product of an extensive investigation by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office in Fresno, California, conducted in the United States and in India with assistance from the Fresno County District Attorney's Office.

According to Assistant United States Attorney David L. Gappa, who is prosecuting the case, the indictment alleges that during the period from January 1994 through October 2004, the defendants conspired to obtain immigration benefits for defendants ATWAL and KAUR, to which they were not entitled, by means of filing applications with immigration authorities that contained false statements. According to the indictment, defendants HOTH and TAGGAR, natives of India and naturalized United States citizens, had been married and were raising two children together. The couple agreed to obtain a divorce for the purpose of entering into sham marriages with defendants ATWAL and KAUR. Defendants HOTH and TAGGAR then traveled to India to marry defendants ATWAL and KAUR, respectively, for the purpose of filing visa petitions for them to enter the United States. The indictment alleges that defendants TAGGAR, ATWAL, and KAUR are siblings. The indictment also alleges that the normal waiting time to immigrate to the United States from India as a brother or sister of a United States citizen is approximately thirteen years, whereas there is no waiting period to enter the United States as a spouse of a United States citizen.

If convicted, the defendants each face a maximum sentence of five years in prison and up to a \$250,000 fine for the conspiracy count, and up to ten years in prison and up to a \$250,000 fine for each count of making false statements. Because defendants KAUR and ATWAL are aliens, they also face possible removal from the United States to India.

All four defendants have been arrested, and they are scheduled to appear before a United States magistrate judge in Fresno on October 27, 2004, at 11:00 a.m.

The charges in the indictment are only allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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